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An old record of the Pearly-breasted Cuckoo in North America and a nomenclatural critique

by Richard C. Banks

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The type of *Coccyzus julieni* Lawrence, 1864, from Sombrero Island, West Indies, is a specimen of the species currently known as the Pearly-breasted (or Euler's) Cuckoo *Coccyzus euleri* Cabanis, 1873, of South

America, as pointed out by Ridgway (1916) and Greenway (1978). Sombrero Island is a small key east of the Virgin Islands and northwest of Anguilla, the northernmost of the Leeward Islands of the Lesser Antilles. This is the only record of this cuckoo in North America (as defined by AOU 1983). Recognition of the identity of this bird raises a nomenclatural problem because the name *julieni* is now generally carried as a junior synonym of *C. americanus*, the Yellow-billed Cuckoo of North America. This problem is discussed below.

Alexis A. Julien collected a small number of birds in 1863 on Sombrero Island, and sent the specimens to George N. Lawrence. Lawrence (1863, 1864a) published separate descriptions of 2 new species from this collection and a complete listing of Julien's birds (1864b) with notes that accompanied the specimens. One of the new species (Lawrence 1864a) was *Coccyzus julieni*, named "in compliment" to its collector. This species "differs from the other yellow-billed West India species, in being without any rufous coloring below or on the quills". The other "yellow-billed species" (*sensu* Sclater 1862) of *Coccyzus* known from the West Indies were *C. americanus* and what is now known as *C. minor*. The new name fell into immediate neglect, and was not mentioned by Sclater (1870), then the authority on New World cuckoos.

In 1873, Cabanis described a new species of cuckoo from Brazil, as *Coccygus euleri*. (*Coccygus* was an emendation of *Coccyzus* Vieillot.) This species was distinguished from the sympatrically wintering *C. americanus* by its smaller size and the lack of rufous colouring on the primaries. Cabanis did not mention *julieni*; if he was aware of Lawrence's (1864a) paper he may not have felt that a comparison of his Brazilian bird with one from the Caribbean was necessary.

Shelley (*in* Sclater & Shelley 1891) treated the names *julieni* and *euleri* as synonyms of *C. americanus*, without comment. Penard & Penard (1910) and Hellmayr (1913) distinguished *euleri* as a South American species distinct from *americanus*, and noted that it is widely distributed in South America; neither mentioned the name *julieni*.

Ridgway (1916) recognized that the type of *C. julieni* was a young bird and that, allowing for differences related to age, it agreed closely with adult Brazilian specimens of *euleri*. He therefore treated *euleri* as a junior synonym of *julieni*. He considered *julieni* to be a South American subspecies of *americanus* and thought that it might also be the breeding form of *americanus* in the West Indies. Cory (1919) similarly treated *julieni* as a South American subspecies of *americanus*, with a single West Indian occurrence, but he also gave species status to *euleri*, to which he ascribed a South American range similar to that of *julieni*.

Hellmayr (1929) cast doubt on Ridgway's (1916) treatment of *julieni*, both as being conspecific with *euleri* and as being a recognizable subspecies of *americanus*. He retained *euleri* as the name of the South American species and at least implied that *julieni* was a synonym of *americanus americanus* (recognizing *americanus occidentalis* as a western North American subspecies). Hellmayr's views were accepted by Peters (1940) and reinforced by Griscom & Greenway (1941). Griscom examined the type of *julieni* and regarded it "as an immature [migrant] *americanus* of minimum size, and certainly not *euleri* of southern Brazil".

Most discussions of South American cuckoos since 1930 seem to follow the taxonomic conclusions of Hellmayr (1929) stated above, but some seem to follow either Ridgway (1916) or Cory (1919). A fourth treatment was devised by Pinto (1966), who believed that *euleri* was a South American subspecies of *americanus* but not a synonym of *julieni*, placement of which is not stated. In many papers, only one of the names *julieni* or *euleri* is used, in either a specific or subspecific sense, and it is not possible to determine the authors' concept of the other name or even how many taxa are recognized.

An important factor in the decision of Pinto (1966) that *euleri* was not a synonym of *julieni* was the fact that the type of the latter was from an island in the Lesser Antilles. However, he later (Pinto 1978) elevated *euleri* to specific rank and listed the Lesser Antilles as possibly in the range of the species, apparently incorporating the locality of the type of *julieni*. It is likely, if not probable, that others who recognized the similarity/identity of *julieni* and *euleri* were confused by the fact that *julieni* was named from Sombrero Island in the Lesser Antilles, well away from the range of most South American birds. On geographical grounds alone it would seem more likely that *julieni* should be associated with the North American than the South American species.

In a discussion of the type specimen of *Coccyzus julieni*, Greenway (1978: 112) noted that both Ridgway and J. T. Zimmer had annotated the label by writing in the name *Coccyzus euleri*. He further observed that the "inner webs of [the] primaries are white, not brown as in *americanus*" and that "Peters' listing of this name [*julieni*] as a synonym of *americanus* appears to have been an error". Greenway (1978) listed the specimen as "Now *Coccyzus euleri* (Cabanis)", but did not take the next logical step to point out that *julieni* predates *euleri* or note that this is the sole record of that species outside the continent of South America.

In July 1987 I examined the holotype of *Coccyzus julieni* Lawrence (AMNH 44495), and was joined in that study by Robert W. Dickerman. The unsexed specimen is in poor condition; the wings are loose and several rectrices are missing. There is no rufous on the dorsal surface of the primaries nor on the inner webs of the ventral surface of the primaries. My measurements of the wing (left 125.7, right 127.1 mm) are slightly greater than the 124 mm reported by Greenway (1978), but they are smaller than any of nearly 700 adult *americanus* (both sexes) that I recently measured (Banks 1988) and fit well with measurements of adult male *euleri*. The range of wing lengths of 219 male *americanus* from eastern North America was 128.7–155.6 (mean 140.81) mm; of 7 adult male *euleri* it was 123.9–131.5 (mean 127.9) mm. Females of both species average about 4 mm larger; measurements of first-year birds are not available. On direct comparison with series of North American *americanus* and South American *euleri*, Dickerman and I agreed that the specimen unquestionably is of the South American form.

The specific name *Coccyzus julieni* Lawrence, 1864 clearly predates *C. euleri* Cabanis, 1873, and is the correct name for the small South American *americanus*-like cuckoos that lack reddish brown colour on the primaries. Although *julieni* has been used as the senior synonym of *euleri* only by Ridgway (1916) and perhaps Steinbacher (1962), who did not

mention *euleri*, it has been used for a South American subspecies of *americanus* by several other authors (e.g. Laubmann 1939, Gyldenstolpe 1945, Steullet & Deautier 1945). Some have incorrectly used the name *julieni* for a form of *C. americanus* with pale rather than dark cinnamon or brown on the primaries, a variable colour character that is not geographically oriented in North American breeding birds (Banks 1988).

Whether the South American birds should be treated as a species or as a subspecies of *americanus* is problematical, although the former is preferred by recent authors. The 2 populations are perhaps best considered as allospecies of a superspecies. The South American *julieni* may have developed from wintering *americanus* that failed to return north to breed.

Ridgway (1916) suggested that the type specimen of *C. julieni* might not have come from Sombrero Island. A. A. Julien was a resident on Sombrero Island from August 1860 until at least early 1864, and sent Lawrence specimens of, or notes on, at least 34 species of birds as well as an account of the island and its bird life (Lawrence 1864b). Included among these notes is a detailed account of the taking of the cuckoo (Lawrence 1864b: 99, Greenway 1978). Even though *C. julieni* was described in a paper with 5 other species from various South American countries (Lawrence 1864a), there is no evidence to suggest that the specimen was not among those sent from Sombrero Island by Julien.

Conclusion

The type specimen of *Coccyzus julieni* Lawrence, 1864, from Sombrero Island in the Caribbean, is a specimen of the South American species now called the Pearly-breasted Cuckoo *Coccyzus euleri* Cabanis, 1873. The name *julieni* has priority and must be used for the South American species. The Sombrero Island bird provides the only record of the species in North America.

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Weights of some New Caledonian birds

by Charles A. Ross

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In August and September 1986 I spent 24 days in the Southern District of New Caledonia collecting avian anatomical specimens for use in systematic studies and to provide comparative material for identifying collections of Holocene fossils (see Balouet & Olson, in press). Of the 360 specimens obtained, 253 were Passeriformes and included 21 of the 24 native, resident species of passerines (Hannecart & Letocart 1980, 1983).

Collections were made at 5 localities: Mount Dzumac, c. 25 km NE of Noumea; La Foa and vicinity; Bouloupari and vicinity; Sarramea; and the Reserve Forestiere du Col D'Amieu, c. 10 km NE of Sarramea. The Col D'Amieu and Mount Dzumac localities are at 400–1000 m a.s.l. and forested. The other localities are on the western coastal plain and are open savannah with scrub and secondary forest, except the Sarramea locality which is mixed forest and agricultural lands (coffee and fruit trees).